CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (currently amended) A method comprising:

determining whether to inform a user of an interactive television service of receipt of an email message, the determining made independent of any query by the user to~~of~~ any email account;

responsive to determining to inform the user of the receipt of the email message, generating a hot key signal indicating availability of the email message, the hot key signal including graphical data for display on a display associated with a user device~~information~~; and

inserting the hot key signal into a content signal transmitted to the user device through the interactive television service via a network through which the interactive television service is provided to the user,

wherein inserting the hot key signal into the content signal comprises multiplexing the hot key signal with the content signal and modulating the multiplexed signal for delivery to the user.

2. (original) The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether to inform the user of the interactive television service of receipt of the email message comprises periodically polling a Post Office Protocol (POP) account of the user.

3. (currently amended) The method of claim 2, further comprising:

retrieving the email message from the POP account; and

sending the email message to the user device as part of the hot key signal.

4. (original) The method of claim 2, wherein the POP account is an account maintained by the interactive television service provider.

5. (original) The method of claim 2, wherein the POP account is an account maintained by an Internet Service Provider (ISP) other than the interactive television service provider.

6. (currently amended) A method comprising:

receiving, as part a content signal sent by an interactive television service to at least one viewer, a hot key signal that is multiplexed into the content signal and modulated with the content signal, indicating receipt of an email message by a Post Office Protocol (POP) account of a user of an interactive television service; the hot key signal including graphical data for display on a display associated with a user device~~information~~ and wherein the hot key signal is independent of any query by the user to~~or user equipment of~~ any email account,

determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user; and responsive to determining the hot key signal is relevant to the user, displaying on the display ~~a screen~~ an indication that the hot key signal has been received.

7. (currently amended) The method of claim 6, further comprising responsive to receiving an indication that a hot key signal is accepted, presenting to the user the email message indicated by the hot key signal.

8. (currently amended) The method of claim 6, wherein determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user comprises determining whether a destination address for the hot key signal is an address of the user.

9. (currently amended) The method of claim 6, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet.

10. (previously presented) The method of claim 9, wherein the Internet Protocol data packet has a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field containing the email message.

11. (currently amended) A system comprising:

a content delivery portion connected with one or more content providers to receive and delivery~~,~~ interactive television (TV) content;

a head-end transport portion connected with the content delivery portion to ~~and~~ delivery~~,~~ content signals from the content delivery portion over a network;

a hot key generation portion for:

determining whether to inform a user of an interactive television service of receipt of an email message, the determining made independent of any query by the user to~~of~~ any email account, and

responsive to determining to inform the user of the receipt of the email message, generating a hot key signal indicating availability of the email message, wherein the hot key signal is multiplexed and modulated with the content signal, and wherein the hot key signal includes graphical data for display on a display associated with a user device~~information~~.

12. (currently amended) The system of claim 11, wherein the head-end transport portion receives the hot key signal from the hot key generation portion, and multiplexes the hot key signal with the content signal.

13. (original) The system of claim 11, wherein the hot key generation portion determines whether to inform the user of the interactive television service of receipt of the email message by periodically polling a Post Office Protocol (POP) account of the user.

14. (original) The system of claim 13, wherein the hot key generation portion retrieves the email message from the POP account and includes the email message as part of the hot key signal.

15. (original) The system of claim 13, wherein the POP account is an account maintained by the interactive television service provider.

16. (original) The system of claim 13, wherein the POP account is an account maintained by an Internet Service Provider (ISP) other than the interactive television service provider.

17. (currently amended) A system comprising:

a receiver for receiving a hot key signal contained in a content signal indicating receipt of an email message by a Post Office Protocol (POP) account of a user of an interactive television service; the hot key signal independent of any query by the user to~~of~~ any email account, and

a processor for:

determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user and,

responsive to determining the hot key signal is relevant to the user, displaying on a screen an indication that the hot key signal has been received, the hot key signal including graphical data for display on a display associated with a user device~~information for display~~,

wherein the demodulator portion demodulates the hot key signal with the content signal and the demultiplexor portion demultiplexes the hot key signal from the content signal.

18. (currently amended) The system of claim 17, wherein the processor, responsive to receiving an indication that a hot key signal is accepted, presents to the user the email message indicated by the hot key signal.

19. (currently amended) The system of claim 17, wherein the processor determines whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user based on whether a destination address for the hot key signal is an address of the user.

20. (currently amended) The system of claim 17, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet.

21. (previously presented) The system of claim 20, wherein the Internet Protocol data packet has a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field containing the email message.

22. (currently amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon a series of instructions, the instructions, when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:

determine whether to inform a user of an interactive television service of receipt of an email message;

responsive to determining to inform the user of the receipt of the email message, generate a hot key signal indicating availability of the email message, the hot key signal including graphical data for display on a display associated with a user device~~information~~; and

insert the hot key signal into a content signal transmitted to the user from an interactive television service provider via a network with which the user and the interactive television service provider are connected;

wherein the determination to inform the user of the receipt of the email message is made independent of any query by the user of any email account, and the hot key signal is multiplexed and modulated with the content signal.

23. (original) The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein determining whether to inform the user of the interactive television service of receipt of the email message comprises periodically polling a Post Office Protocol (POP) account of the user.

24. (currently amended) The machine-readable medium of claim 23, wherein the instructions further cause the processor to:

retrieve the email message from the POP account; and

send the email message to the user as part of the hot key signal.

25. (original) The machine-readable medium of claim 23, wherein the POP account is an account maintained by the interactive television service provider.

26. (original) The machine-readable medium of claim 23, wherein the POP account is an account maintained by an Internet Service Provider (ISP) other than the interactive television service provider.

27. (currently amended) A machine-readable medium having stored thereon a series of instructions, the instructions, that when executed by a processor, cause the processor to:

receive, from a receiver that demodulates and demultiplexes a hot key signal contained in a content signal to a user of an interactive television service, the hot key signal indicating receipt of an email message by a Post Office Protocol (POP) account of the user, the hot key signal including graphical data for display on a display associated with a use device~~information~~;

determine whether the signal is relevant to the user; and responsive to determining the hot key signal is relevant to the user, display on a screen an indication that the hot key signal has been received;

wherein the signal is independent of any query by the user of any email account.

28. (currently amended) The machine-readable medium of claim 27, further comprising responsive to receiving an indication that a hot key signal is accepted, presenting to the user the email message indicated by the hot key signal.

29. (currently amended) The machine-readable medium of claim 27, wherein determining whether the hot key signal is relevant to the user comprises determining whether a destination address for the hot key signal is an address of the user.

30. (currently amended) The machine-readable medium of claim 27, wherein the hot key signal comprises an Internet Protocol (IP) data packet.

31. (previously presented) The machine-readable medium of claim 30, wherein the Internet Protocol data packet has a header portion and a body portion, the body portion having a data field containing the email message.